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DE RUEHUB #0999 2921613  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM USINT HAVANA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2398

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL WOMAN OF COURAGE: MARTHE BEATRIZ  
ROQUE

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In response in request in reftel, Post wishes to re-nominate leading Cuban dissident Martha Beatriz Roque for the International Woman of Courage Award. As we noted in nominating Ms Roque for the inaugural award in 2007, while her work is not focused specifically on women's issues Martha Beatriz has continued to show exceptional courage and leadership in pressing for democratic change and respect for human rights in Cuba. Facing possible additional jail time and constant harassment by Cuban authorities, she has not only continued to advance her agenda and push for the release of all political prisoners, she has increased those activities. By any definition, Martha Beatriz Roque is a true woman of courage, End summary,

¶2. (SBU) Roque, an economist, was part of the establishment until 1990, teaching statistics and mathematics at the University of Havana. That year, after performing a critical audit of the tourism industry, she decided to join the opposition. In 1995, she formed the Cuban Institute of Independent Economists. In 1997, she was among four key dissidents jailed for signing "The Homeland Belongs to All," a statement in response to Communist-Party glorification of the island's communist system. In all, Roque spent more than three years behind bars for peacefully expressing her democratic ideals. In the infamous "Black Spring" crackdown of 2003, when the regime arrested, quickly tried and sentenced 75 dissidents to lengthy terms, Roque was the only female dissident rounded up. She was sentenced to 20 years for violating Law 88 on "Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba." In July 2004, the GOC released her on conditional probation, presumably on health grounds. However, because the GOC could return her to prison at any time, Roque still considers herself a political prisoner.

¶3. (SBU) Roque has shown tremendous courage in standing up to the Castro regime. For its part, the regime continues to show persistence and creativity in trying to harass Roque and intimidate her into silence. It has dispatched State Security agents to infiltrate her organization; had militants besiege her home, preventing Roque from leaving; and carried out countless "acts of repudiation" against her, using humiliating and degrading material.

¶4. (SBU) In a sense The Cuban government's preoccupation with Roque is understandable; her commitment to promoting human rights and speaking openly about the regime's abuses poses a very real threat to the totalitarian state. On September 28, Roque organized and carried out a country-wide protest directed at delivering a petition to the Minister of Justice asking for the release of political prisoners. The response of the Cuban government was to detain Roque and many of her followers. The event helped expose the nature of the regime just as it was arguing in favor of its anti-embargo resolution before the U.N. General Assembly.

COMMENT

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¶5. (SBU) As we noted in our nomination for the inaugural award in 2007, Martha Beatriz Roque may not fit the typical mold for the Secretary's "Women of Courage" award as she has never focused on "women's rights" per se. Nevertheless, we continue to believe that her 16-year crusade in opposition to the totalitarian regime is aimed at empowering both women and men with fundamental political and economic freedoms that will enable them one day to build a democratic Cuba.

¶6. (SBU) While we believe Martha Beatriz Roque is an excellent candidate for the award, we do not believe she would be allowed to leave the island to accept it. We do not think this should stand in the way of her nomination, however. Roque's mail and phone communications are monitored by the Cuban Government; her telephone number is 53-7-406-821. Her address is Calle Luis Esteban No. 352, Apto. 3, Santo Suarez, Havana.

Point of contact for this nomination is Human Rights Officer Thomas Hamm; tel: 53-7-833-3555 ext. 2686.

WILLIAMS